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Language differences peculiar to the disadvantaged are discussed as they relate to reading. Linguistic differences, including the interdependence among language, operant feedback, thought, and experience, and the power of these to reconstruct and reassociate through reading constitute one barrier. Another is the effects of language on the total adjustment of the individual and the problems involved in trying to place him in a classroom. The language experience approach is described as perhaps the best way to bring together the student's experiences, language, thought, feedback, and reading. Role playing and other activities growing out of the language experience approach bring together the world of the student and the world of the classroom. References are included. (MD)

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LANGUAGE BARRIERS OF THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT

Who are the culturally different or disadvantaged? Why is their education a special problem, and in particular, how are their differences in communication with the middle class culture related to methods for their instruction in reading?

Like any broad generalization or group statistic, the term "culturally disadvantaged" does not really describe for me the real Ruth or Sarah or Leviticus or any other of the junior high school pupils whom I teach in one of Columbia's poverty areas. They each have their own separate needs, drives and interests as surely as do students from affluent homes. The category "disadvantaged" is no more specifically meaningful for detailed selection of methods and materials for a given lesson than is the term "affluent". I still must test and teach, evaluate and experiment, and build in painstaking stages a profile of Ruth's or Sarah's behavior that is related to learning to read. What the general category tells me is that certain characteristics are more likely to be present with these pupils than with another selected population; but which of these characteristics are actually present or whether even, if present, they can be considered an educational disadvantage must be determined individually.

One of the general characteristics common to many of the culturally different are the significant linguistic differences between their speech patterns and the standard English of the

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middle class. Surely language represents the humanizing element that makes true intimacy between one another possible, but because this is so, language differences have a way of separating and alienating as well as the opposite. Therefore, I should like to develop the next few remarks around the general topics of language, the culturally different, and reading, attempting to suggest the rationale that language being what it is, language patterns may act as a significant restriction to reading achievement unless certain basic principles about the language-reading relationship are considered during reading instruction.

Because much that has been said about language or speech comes from the linguists, I shall borrow from them rather heavily in the next few statements. According to Lefevre, "Language forms a network, a continuous webbing indissolubly linking inner man, his thoughts and emotions with other events, actions, sanctions, social groups and institutions." He continues his discourse about language as an interactive process by suggesting that "thought at higher levels is inconceivable without a prior development of both the audio-lingual and manual-visual systems of language."[1]

Alexander Johnson in a Treatise on Language indicates the interdependence between the words of language, experience, and reading. "Words", he says, "can refer us to sensible information which we have experienced; but they cannot reveal to us

what we have not experienced."[2] Reading, he continues, is the mental process of reconstructing the experiences behind language.

Vera John and Leo Goldstein, writing on the social context of language acquisition, describes how a child of the middle class acquires a spoken language through feedback and correction of his own active speech. The culturally disadvantaged, on the other hand, learns his language by receptive exposure, without the operant control of feedback. Language, to him, will have little use as a mediator in interpersonal behavior.[3] This restriction through passive exposure without feedback is also pertinent to the culturally disadvantaged and their world of experience. Without guided perception of the things which he has experienced, or verbal manipulation of ideas about his experience, very little in terms of a significant body of meanings or concepts can be accumulated.[4]

Piaget would disagree with the idea that language and thought can be explained by one another. Thought, according to piaget, derives from the abstraction of one's own action upon things; language is an imitation of patterns provided by adults. However, Piaget does suggest that the relationship is one of a tool or handmaiden, rather than that one is the master of the other. "Language facilitates the expansion of thought and adds to its mobility."[5] From a practical point of view, there is some significance in this difference. If language is

deceptive in relation to thought, then "teachers of middle class children (may be) often misled by the verbal facility of (their) youngsters into believing that they understand more than they actually comprehend." And on the other hand, "the teachers of the (culturally different) are often fooled by the language handicaps of these children into thinking that they are much more (thought handicapped) than they actually are."[6] This point of view expresses once again the individual dynamics at work, whatever the general classification of the student.

The preceding comments from language specialists have indicated the interdependence between language, operant feedback, thought, and experience, and the power of these functions to reconstruct and reassociate through reading. It is directly in line with these functions that the culturally different person may also be educationally disadvantaged as he is confronted by the world of the middle class. What is this language like? While this question is an exceedingly technical one, differing from group to group, some fairly general observations may be pertinent. First of all, just because a person speaks with a dialect or accent does not mean that the difference is educationally handicapping. The syntactical and grammatical level of the person's native language or dialect may be used as a present potential for language facility in the adopted culture, for the rules under which the native language operates transfers

from one mode to another with relatively little difficulty. For a person who has not developed a complex syntactical or grammatical fluency in his first language, little transfer can take place, and attempts to educate through the second language will find difficulty.

There are other facets of a language difference that are more than the linguistic; they are the far reaching effects in the total adjustment of the individual, maintaining a wall of separation between him and the world into which he is thrust. How does the culturally different relate to the middle class world of Dick and Jane and all the other characters of the middle class Anglo-Saxon story books? To begin with, he has had few experiences with toys, pictures, books, or magazines and few if any of the other common denominators of middle class life. Very little spoken language has passed between him and his parents. He possesses strong negative feelings concerning his personal worth and devalues himself as a student. He has moved from school to school and from failure to failure. He has not learned to communicate, especially with the middle class, developing instead fears and suspicions of their way of life. Which cues he responds to, how he will respond, and what his responses will be are learned reactions from a totally different environment than the school offers. These differences are seen as points of exclusion between him and the middle class.

This whole process of exclusion, based in significant part on linguistic separation, helps to set a self-concept that has a higher correlation to achievement than do so-called measurements of intelligence.[7] This self-concept is based on at least two factors: the expectations one's society and peers have for him and the kinds of behavior patterns which the individual himself selects as a "style of life," which helps determine what he will see and hear, think and say, remember and forget. "Any value which is inconsistent with the individual's valuation of himself cannot be assimilated: it meets with resistance and is likely, unless a general reorganization occurs, to be rejected."[8]

The typical classroom, whose power structure is geared to middle class speech patterns, likely places this linguistically different student with a style of life quite different from theirs in a special grouping with the stated purpose of more adequately attending to his needs. Studies by both Meyerowitz (1968) and Goffman indicate that special placement, instead of helping a pupil adjust, actually hinders him. Putting such a pupil in a "slow" or otherwise labeled class probably contributes significantly to his feelings of inferiority and likely creates lowered expectations on the part of the teacher also. Lloyd Dunn of George Peabody College for Teachers contends that much of such grouping simply creates labels rather than helping

to emphasize a daily positive formulation of teaching and learning methods immediately relevant to the student. Added to this physical exclusion are too often found intolerance, rigidity, strict discipline, and even physical force meted out by the teacher. One of the major problems that we have already pointed out is that the student does not come with a built-in feeling of relatedness to the classroom, and surely these actions do nothing to lessen his feelings of rejection. Sol Tax, speaking at the 1968 Claremont Reading Conference on this topic, stated that the reading and writing of the classroom must reflect the identity of the learner, and to the extent that they do not they are discarded. He discussed the interesting history of the Cherokees of Georgia as an illustration of this point. Because I am not elsewhere familiar with this history, I will paraphrase it from Sol Tax. The Cherokees became literate within three years after Sequoia invented written symbols for their language in the early 1800's. They introduced their own printing presses and evolved a literate culture. They were then forceably moved to Oklahoma where they built seminaries, teaching Greek and Latin for the first time in any school west of the Mississippi. In 1900, Oklahoma became a state and the Indians were forced to learn by the white man's methods. Today, the Cherokees are the poorest and the least educated Indians in Oklahoma.[9] Many other selections from the literature indicate

the importance of using the learner's language. Walter Loban, writing for Elementary English, stresses that the language the child brings should be fostered as a means of thinking, exploring, and imagining, helping the student to develop and amplify his own language to the full range of his linguistic potential.[10] James Flemming, writing for the Reading Teacher in October, 1968, also emphasizes the point that reading instruction should not be a test of a match in pronunciation between the student and teacher, but that differences in pronunciation, even substitutions of words, should be seen as differing from mistakes in reading. To understand if the student has made a correct transliteration between the print of the book and his own linguistic system, the teacher will need to understand the student's language, including his grammar and homonyms. Mark Weiss, a graduate student at the University of South Carolina, is presently involved with a research study in an attempt to teach teachers the language of particular dialectic groups of students. His technique is to tape-record and video-tape the language of children from particular dialect groupings in both play and classroom activities. After a linguist has evaluated and interpreted the tapes, he will use them as a basis for teacher in-service training workshops. The workshops will include not only intensive and directed listening on the part of teachers, but they will be expected to be able,to use the dialect with at

least a passing acquaintance themselves. The question should be raised, and indeed the literature in general seems to suggest that the teacher's role is finally to help bring about a second language for the language different student. But in this the teacher must act as a model, not as a speech corrector. While the literature suggests that a move toward a second language must start fairly early in the elementary grades before sensitivity to new sounds is lost, Lefevre states that "if a dialect change is to be effected, it must be done finally on the initiative of the child himself."[11]

Assuming the ideal that the teacher has learned the language of the student, the teacher must have yet another change of heart or practice from the typical classroom. According to Ned Flanders, the teacher habitually dominates the interactive opportunities of the classroom by his own speech. Percentagewise it is something like this: about 66 per cent of the time of the class is directed to talking, about 66 per cent of this talk is done by the teacher, and about 66 per cent of the teacher's talk is directive. If the student is to learn how to interact and to communicate within the classroom, this ratio is going to have to change. Carlton and Moore at the Illinois State University have published an interesting study in which they attempted this change through a self-directive dramatization of stories. Self-directive dramatization refers to the pupil's original, imagina-

tive, spontaneous interpretation of a character of his own choosing in a story which he selects and reads cooperatively with other pupils in a group which is formed only for the time being and for a particular story. Because self-selection of stories is involved, many books on many levels and varieties are made available at all times in the classroom. Comparisons of classes after the experimental period indicated significant changes in both self-concept and reading behavior in favor of the experimental groups over the traditionally taught basal reader groups. In fact, the dramatization groups indicated more than a year's growth in reading in three and a half months.[12]

Perhaps there is no better way to bring together the student's experiences, language, thought, feedback, and reading than through the language experience approach. Sylvia Ashton-Warner describes in her book Teacher her method of building all the language arts from an organic vocabulary. It is organic because it springs from the innermost recesses of the child's inner self, expressing his fears and desires. These first words are the bridge from the known to the unknown and from the inner man out. They are word pictures that have power, for they represent the child's inner vision. They have intense meaning, for they are a part of the thought processes of the child himself. And thus Sylvia Ashton-Warner builds the

skills of reading and writing around the words of fear and love and sex that make up the lives of the Maori children within her classroom. Her system is in relation to the beginning reader, but the process is meaningful at any age. Experience approaches to learning can be initiated through television viewing, movies, the comics, or any other type of media. Comparisons of plot, structure, setting, staging, dialogue, special effects, character development, thematic content, and much more can be developed from a common viewing experience. Other follow-up activities may be group discussions, supplementary readings, oral readings of a similar setting or theme, and so forth.

These suggestions have been illustrative and not in any sense inclusive of techniques for working with children with language differences. They have meant to illustrate the kinds of things that teachers can do to capitalize on the strengths that the student brings with him to the classroom. We have also meant to indicate that the student or the group must at times at least be the power variable psychologically within the classroom; it need not always be the teacher. Role playing, activities growing out of language experience approaches, and the like, can help bring together parts of both worlds -- the world of the student and the world of the classroom. The student's perceptions from his environment are not interpreted as grostesque but are superimposed upon the adopted culture, creating at least

a modicum of integrity for him within the capabilities of his own psychological system. Further, these activities have indicated interdependence between language, operant feedback, thought, and experience, and the power of these to reconstruct and reassociate through reading.

FOOTNOTES

1. Carl A. Lefevre, "Language and Self: Fulfillment or Trauma?" Elementary English, 43(February, 1966), p. 126.
2. Alexander Johnson, A Treatise on Language (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1947), p. 54.
3. Vera P. John and Leo S. Goldstein, "The Social Context of Language Acquisition," in Disadvantaged Child (Seattle, Washington: Special Child Publications, 1967), pp. 457-469.
4. Thomas J. Edwards, "The Language Experience Attack on Cultural Deprivation", The Reading Teacher, 18 (April, 1965), pp. 546 - 51.
5. Jean Piaget, Six Psychological Studies (New York: Random House, 1968), p. xvi.
6. David Elkind, "Giant in the Nursery - Jean Piaget" New York Times Magazine, (May 26, 1968).
7. W. W. Wattenberg and C. Clifford, "Relationship of Self-concept to Beginning Achievement in Reading," Childhood Education, XLIII (September, 1966), p. 58.
8. Prescott Lecky, Self-consistency - A Theory of Personality, (Shoe-String Press, Inc., 1967), pp. 152 - 153.
9. Sol Tax, "Self and Society," from Claremont Reading Conference 1968 Yearbook, (Claremont, California: Claremont University Center).

10. Walter Loban, Teaching Children Who Use Social Class Dialects, Elementary English, 45 (May, 1968), pp. 592-9.

11. Carl A. Lefevre, "Language and Self: Fulfillment or Trauma?" Elementary English, (February, March, 1966), pp. 124-133; 230-234.

12. Lessie Carlton and Robert H. Moore, Reading, Self-Directive Dramatization and Self-Concept, (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968).